

Inside

Iraq feedback

"I'm going to take a long hot bath and lie in my bed — a real bed," said Sgt. Leticia Scott about her plans upon returning to Germany from Iraq. See page 2 for more.



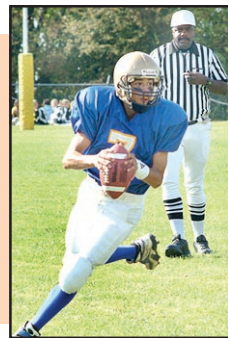
Fists in Friedberg

Boxers heat up Hispanic Heritage Invitational. See page 27.



Homecoming

Local high school football players weren't the only ones celebrating Homecoming activities. See pages 23, 26 and 28.



Herald Union



Vol. XI, No. 1

Serving the military communities of the 104th Area Support Group

Oct. 14, 2003

R&R support

Transportation officials go into overdrive to help soldiers get to their destinations

Story and photos by Karl Weisel
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

As spouses and friends waited for soldiers to arrive at Rhein Main Air Base on Rest and Recuperation leave last week, they were

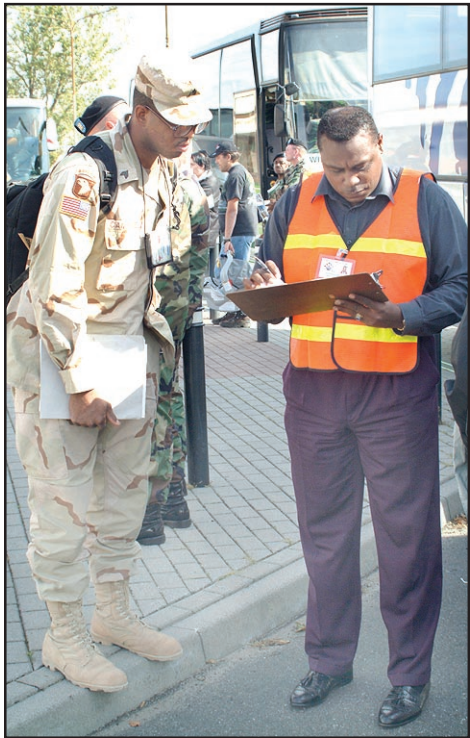


Photo by Karl Weisel

Anthony Smith, a transportation specialist with the 104th Area Support Group's Directorate of Logistics, gets Sgt. Michael Campbell of the 501st Forward Support Battalion squared away with a ride to Butzbach from Rhein Main Air Base after arriving on R&R leave from Iraq.

kept informed about flight arrival times by a small group of hard-working professionals from the 104th Area Support Group.

Members of the 104th ASG's Directorate of Logistics have been working closely with the 64th Replacement Company and their Air Force counterparts to ensure Operation Iraqi Freedom soldiers and their families are kept up-to-date on flight arrival times and assured of bus transportation to their home destinations in Germany. That has meant moving their operations from Hanau to Rhein Main, working through the night and being extremely flexible as flight times have changed again and again.

Putting in the extra hours is nothing new for the members of the 104th ASG's DOL. From the early planning in preparation for deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom through the most recently announced R&R program, ASG and base support battalion logisticians have worked overtime to ensure soldiers and their equipment were properly equipped and transported.

"You see that you're making a difference," said Jessica Winter, a transportation specialist with the 104th ASG's DOL. Winter and her fellow transportation colleagues, Anthony Smith, Judy Ybay and Leanon Trawick, were on hand to greet the fourth wave of soldiers on their way from Iraq to Frankfurt via Kuwait. As bus drivers lined up their vehicles in preparation to transport the soldiers to points throughout Germany and

See R&R support on page 4



Photo by Spc. Shauna McRoberts

First day of school in Iraq

Maj. Gregg Softy, operations officer of the 1st Armored Division's 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, helps a young Iraqi schoolgirl tie her new shoes on the first day of class at Dufaf Al-Neil primary school in Baghdad Oct. 1. Along with the shoes, Softy and other members of the Büdingen-based 1-1st Cavalry handed out school supplies, hygiene products and toys donated by organizations in the United States. Soldiers from the unit worked throughout the summer repairing schools and gathering supplies to hand out to Iraqi children at the start of the new school year.

Phone cards cut costs for FRG leaders

By Karl Weisel

104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

Family Readiness Group leaders constantly find themselves out in the community helping families stay informed and involved.

Realizing that these FRG leaders may be away from their home or office with a need to communicate telephonically to unit spouses and local organizations, 104th Area Support Group Army Community Service leaders came up with the idea of supplying them with pre-paid phone cards.

"Our FRG volunteers occasionally have the need to make phone calls, and it's not always convenient for them to go into an FRG office," said John Bomberger, non-

appropriated funds business manager for the 104th Area Support Group. "Some were also not aware that there is a procedure for them to be reimbursed for their FRG-related telephone calls."

By using the "free" phone cards, FRG leaders can avoid the somewhat time-consuming process of filing a DD Form-1154 for reimbursement of the authorized telephone calls, reduce their personal expenses and have the option of calling from any telephone, Bomberger said.

"We decided to purchase phone cards for the FRG leaders to make it more convenient for them and to give them an incentive to serve their FRG. We want to support our soldiers and families any way we can during the deployment," he said.

Authorized Unit FRGs may receive up to 200 units of pre-paid time per month, Bomberger said. "Conceivably one card could last up to six months, but in any case they won't get a new card until the old one runs out. If the FRG leader believes he or she has legitimate phone charges in excess of the monthly phone card allotment, he or she can elect not to receive the phone card and instead submit a DD Form 1154 along with substantiating information for up to \$150 per month."

FRG leaders should contact their local ACS officer for more information about obtaining the card. These volunteers must be registered with the local ACS installation volunteer coordinator, he said.

Feedback: What's the first thing you'll do upon returning from Iraq?



Sgt. Harold King
1st Military
Intelligence Battalion

"Spend a lot of time with my family, have a thick, juicy steak and an ice cold beer."



Sgt. Patrick Henry
27th Transportation Battalion

"Kiss the ground because I'd be happy to be back."



Spc. Heath Mills
1st Military
Intelligence Battalion

"I'm going to take my girlfriend home to South Carolina and propose."



Staff Sgt. Denise Armstrong
27th Transportation Battalion

"I need a full body spa because I'm torn up from head to toe."



Pfc. Jamal Hopson
1st Military
Intelligence Battalion

"Love on my wife. She's pregnant, so I'm going to rub on her belly."

Army spouse describes how she copes with deployment

By **Luz Medeiros**
104th Area Support Group Public
Affairs Office

When the war in Iraq started, I knew I would soon be spending more time by myself. Realizing my husband would be deploying, I was full of anxiety. While my husband wanted to be part of the conflict to defend and support our country, he knew it would involve a sacrifice — leaving me behind.

The moment he told me his unit would be deployed I tried not to get too emotional. Instead I started helping him and getting involved in every single detail. I wanted to spend every moment with him, to be there for him all the time including the day he left. Keeping myself busy, helping him get ready, packing, taking care of him was a good way to keep my mind occupied.

Even after he had everything ready, deep inside I still hoped he wouldn't have to go.

The moment arrived and I prayed to God every day to help me be strong to endure this time alone. I was so busy helping him I never stopped to think about what I would do after he left.

Separating from my husband was hard but in one way it helped me become more independent. Things don't always go the way we want them to, but I learned not to see just the negative side of something. Life is a constant push and pull of sad and happy, ups and downs. We need the sad to really feel the happy.

I learned to associate with people who encourage me and who are positive role models. I'm grateful for the love and support of my family and wonderful friends. My mom has played a very important role during this time of my life. She is a very supportive woman.

Even though I am a strong person, I still have my up and down days. When I feel lonely I first think of the unconditional love of God and then think about my family and friends. A good person is always nearby. Often we don't appreciate this gift.

Involving myself in the community was necessary because there are so many spouses who need help overcoming this stressful situation. I knew any help I could provide would be gratefully accepted. It feels so good to help others.

Becoming an Army Family Team Building program instructor has been a big help for me. It's a lot easier to understand deployment when you are involved.

English is my second language, and I'm proud to be able to use my language skills to communicate with other spouses who may not be able to speak English.

When my husband left, many things changed. Celebrating my 10th wedding anniversary with my husband was something I had been looking forward to, but now that won't happen. Also we had been looking forward to starting a family, but due to medical reasons and his absence, this may never occur.

I always say things happen for a reason, even though we may not understand why. Growth comes when we are willing to face the bad and go forward anyway. In the end I know bad memories will fade and good ones will remain.

There is always a positive side to everything. We must become more independent to boost our self-esteem. There is nothing quite like knowing we can take care of ourselves, no matter what happens.

Shake things up — make a change

Commentary by **Karl Weisel**
104th Area Support Group Public
Affairs Office

Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning.

Autumn ushers in spectacular sunrises and a jolt to the emotional landscape. Following such an unusually long summer in Germany — the warmest in centuries according to some reports — the onset of the colder nights and shorter days of fall can come as a shock.

Children are back in school, busy with homework, school friends and extracurricular activities. Outdoor activities are curtailed or spent in the dark during the morning and evening hours. For some people the urge to make like the bears and hibernate during the colder months may seem extremely tempting.

But autumn, like spring, offers the perfect opportunity to shake things up. Along with the shift in weather

comes the chance to change one's habits, to hone a long neglected talent or to simply get back on track with a positive lifestyle choice.

People who have been putting off exercising or quitting smoking may find themselves with just the incentive to join others in a smoking cessation program or to work out more at a local fitness center. Besides being good for you, they offer the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends.

Bored at home with fewer hours to enjoy the outdoors and local sights? How about spending more time poring over the local concert and museum listings. Fall and winter are the ideal time to plan on attending a concert or visiting a museum. Parents can also include their children in those activities. Introducing young people to the worlds of classical or jazz music can

expand their horizons. There are also scores of museums that appeal to all ages such as Frankfurt's Senckenberg Museum, Giessen's Math Museum or Mainz' Gutenberg Museum to name just a few.

Regular volksmarches, going skiing with Outdoor Recreation or taking a trip with the USO are other ways to shake up your routine. How about finally going back to school to increase your knowledge of the world? Ever considered coaching a youth sports team? What about helping out at your child's school or taking a bike trip with other members of your Family Readiness Group?

After autumn comes winter which can be even more daunting to the spirits. Why not make a stab at taking on a new challenge today to be ready for Old Man Winter when he blows around?

Herald Union

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News flash

Tax relief restrictions

U.S. Army Europe Customs agents remind users of Value Added Tax relief that there are certain restrictions when using the forms. "The three most common violations we discover are that some VAT forms are used for home construction projects which is not allowed, that some people buy items in commercial quantities which is also not authorized, and that some people use forms that have a •2,500 limit to buy goods over that amount," said Bill Johnson, USAREUR Customs Executive Agency director of services. Goods or services obtained using the VAT form must be for personal use only. People who violate these rules risk receiving a hefty fine, tax demand from the German tax authorities and military administrative action, where applicable, Johnson said. Contact your local VAT office, call mil 381-7610 or browse to https://public.mwr.army.mil/MWR_Tax.htm for more information. (USAREUR Customs Public Affairs Office)

Set clocks back

Don't forget to set your clocks back one hour before going to bed Oct. 25. Daylight-saving time "falls back" one hour in the early morning hours of Oct. 26 in Germany.

Mailing deadlines

Army Post Office officials recommend that postal patrons mail items by the following dates if they want to ensure their mail reaches its destination by Christmas. □ From Germany to the continental United States — **SAM parcels** Nov. 20, **PAL parcels** Dec. 4, **priority parcels** and **first class letters and cards** Dec. 11, **express mail** Dec. 18. □ From Germany to the Central Command area — **MPS parcels** Nov. 20. □ From the continental United States to the Central Command area — **SAM parcels** Nov. 6. While there is no limit to the number of MPS packages that can be mailed to the Central Command area, patrons are advised to mail no more than five during a visit to ensure quicker processing, to make an appointment at their APO from 8-9 a.m. for more than five packages and to mail smaller packages rather than larger ones to ensure faster shipping.

USO Service Salute

This year's USO Europe Service Salute, held at the Wiesbaden Kurhaus Oct. 3, honored German and American service members in each branch of the service and commemorated the American Forces Network Europe's 60th anniversary. The event, hosted by the USO Council of Europe, honored 10 German and American service members including the U.S. Army's Sgt. Stephanie Miller from Mannheim and the U.S. Air Force's Airman Steven J. Albert from Rhein Main Air Base.

Commissary recalls

The manufacturer of Comtrex Deep Chest Cold Softgels has recalled certain lots of the product because the package lists the maximum dosage as 12 softgels in 24 hours rather than eight softgels in any 24-hour period. The manufacturer stated that use of the product above the correct daily dose is not likely to create a serious health risk but may cause temporary side effects. The affected product bears a UPC of 3-19810-30079-9. Commissary patrons can return the affected product for a full refund.

Commissary officials also report that they are no longer accepting "home-printed" coupons as the grocery industry comes to terms with the fraudulent use of Internet coupons. "We still gladly accept manufacturers' coupons — the kind you clip out of newspapers or magazines or that you receive in the mail. What we're not accepting are coupons that have been downloaded from the Internet and printed with a home computer, because it's too difficult for our cashiers to tell if they are valid," said Bob Vitikacs, the Defense Commissary Agency's director of operations and product support. (DeCA-Europe Release)

Army lauds MWR programs Local organizations, individuals recognized

By Karl Weisel

104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

Having a wealth of first-rate recreation programs available plays a large part in assuring community members of a high quality of life standard. People who call the Base Support Battalions of the 104th ASG home know they are surrounded by a multifaceted assortment of Morale Welfare and Recreation facilities and services providing just that assurance.

"We tailor our programs to put the emphasis on the people who need the services and support," said James Ehrenreich of the 104th ASG's Directorate of Community Activities. "With many of the soldiers deployed, we are gearing our programs more to the families and children — the folks who are left behind. We have to take care of them."

The Department of the Army recognizes that high level of commitment and recently lauded several organizations and individuals in the 104th ASG with Army-level Recreation Awards. The 221st and 284th BSB received eight awards out of a possible 16. "This is the third year in a row that the 104th ASG Recreation Division has earned more recreation awards than any other ASG in the Army," said Ehrenreich.

"We have great people in the BSBs," he said, adding, "We emphasize programming. ... It's not just having the infrastructure and equipment — you've got to have good people."

The following 104th ASG agencies and individuals were recognized as being the best in the Army during the Installation Management Agency-Europe MWR Expo in Heidelberg Sept. 23: □ **284th BSB Installation Recreation Program** (medium sized), □ **Employee of the Year Giessen librarian Reginald Stewart**, □ **284th BSB Library Program** (medium sized), □ **284th BSB Arts and Crafts Program** (medium sized), □ **284th BSB Sports and Fitness Program** (medium sized), □ **221st BSB Arts and Crafts Program** (large installation), □ **221st BSB Outdoor Recreation Program** (large installation), □ **221st BSB Recreation Delivery System** (large installation).

"It's a team effort," said Ann Burski, 284th BSB community librarian. "We're of course on cloud nine."

In the case of Giessen librarian Reginald Stewart, who has raked in the accolades including an IMA-E Stalwart nomination and recognition as the 2003 Federal Library and Information Center Library Technician of the Year, "it's a willingness and interest in working with children," said Burski. "He's really willing to do everything and give 200 percent."

Taking their recreation programs to the people who need them, rather than waiting for customers to arrive, is a large



Photo by Petra Roberts

Librarian Reginald Stewart (right) assists library patrons at the Giessen Library.

part of their success, Burski said. "Our people have a commitment to overcome all odds ... to go out beyond our four walls to serve a very diverse community. Children can't always get into the library, so it's important that we take the program to them." Programs such as the Story Mobile and Story Time are examples of taking it to the people, she said.

"I have a wonderful staff," said Jean Morrison, 221st BSB community recreation chief. "It's all about teamwork. We all care about the customers and strive to meet their expectations."

Networking closely with the various MWR and supporting community organizations is vital to providing a rich, comprehensive recreation program, she said. "The Recreation Delivery System award speaks well for the community as a whole," said Morrison.

"When the spouses left (deployed to Kuwait and Iraq) we concentrated more on family things," she said. Managers also reached out more to spouses and children in communities such as Dexheim, providing outreach support.

"The staff certainly deserves the credit — they've done an exceptional job," said Morrison. "Those folks work with customers every day and make it happen. ... And the branch chiefs instill that customer-oriented approach with their employees. Everybody in the organization really deserves credit."



Helping the Hope Institute

1st Sgt. Scott Bailey, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, carries boxes into the Hope Institute in Balad, Iraq. Soldiers from the unit have worked with the 308th Civil Affairs Brigade for the past several weeks to repair the school for the speech and hearing impaired and get it ready for the approaching school year. Part of Operation Anaconda Neighborhood, the fixup effort also included school bus repairs.

Photo by Sgt. Grant Calease

News and features

Flu shots to be administered

By Cynthia Vaughan

Europe Army Regional Medical Command
Public Affairs Office

Make a free, easy and personal investment in good health this season — roll up your sleeve and get a flu shot. That's the message from Brig. Gen. Elder Granger, Tricare Europe lead agent, commander, Europe Regional Medical Command, and command surgeon U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army.

An adequate supply of influenza vaccine is available this year, and will arrive in time for inoculation before the onset of the flu season in Europe, said Granger. The flu season usually begins here in November and runs through March with the greatest number of cases usually occurring in January.

The vaccine will be available at local military treatment facilities for soldiers and other military health care beneficiaries. Commanders will coordinate vaccinations with supporting medical personnel and advise soldiers on the process.



Information on general population vaccination clinics will be announced in the coming weeks through local news outlets, he said.

"It is important for people to be vaccinated against the flu," Granger said. "In an average year, influenza is associated with more than 20,000 deaths nationwide in the United States.

We want to see our soldiers and other beneficiaries stay healthy, and take an active role in health promotion and preventive medicine initiatives. The influenza vaccine helps do this."

Getting vaccinated against influenza is one way to stay healthy and maintain military medical readiness, he said.

U.S. service members deployed in support of operations in Iraq, Southwest Asia, Afghanistan and Eastern Europe, as well as active duty troops afloat, were among the first to be vaccinated when vaccines begin arriving in early October.

Service members in Europe will begin get-

ting vaccinations Oct. 15. Priority for the vaccine goes to soldiers directly involved with force protection, health care providers with direct patient contact, patients over 65, patients who have high-risk medical conditions such as cardiac or respiratory illnesses and immune deficiencies, and all other active duty personnel.

High-risk patients should consult their doctors about receiving the vaccine earlier than the general population. The influenza vaccine will be provided to all medical beneficiaries free of charge.

Vaccination protection against influenza develops about two weeks after getting the shot and may last up to a year. Additionally, the viruses in the vaccine have been killed, so people do not get influenza from the vaccine. People who have had serious allergic reaction to eggs or to a previous dose of influenza vaccine or people who have a history of Guillain-Barre Syndrome should consult with a doctor before getting the vaccine.

R&R support

Continued from page 1

Italy, the four checked manifests and directed passengers to the proper bus.

"It's very emotional for me," said Smith. "It inspires me when I see that young man or young woman coming through the door. You can feel their happiness.

"Our motto is 'No soldier will be left behind,'" he said, adding that regardless of where a soldier is headed, the transportation staff will do their best to provide that service for him or her.

"I think the most amazing thing about this is how different organizations have come together to make this happen," said Trawick, 104th ASGDOL transportation chief. "The 64th Replacement Company has been very accommodating — providing office space and assistance.

"We've been working an aver-

age of 14-hour days," said Trawick, adding that his staff has risen to the challenge and gained a wealth of first-hand civilian deployment experience. They've all been good soldiers. The BSBs and bus companies have also been very supportive."

"Just keep doing what you're doing," said Gen. B.B. Bell, U.S. Army Europe commander, to the staff on hand at Rhein Main Sept. 30. As the number of flights increases and the first wave of soldiers returning to Iraq begins moving through Rhein Main, "our ability to deal with it will double and quadruple," Bell told the staff at Rhein Main, charging them to "spend money, hire more people and get volunteers out here" to ensure soldiers are taken care of during their R&R travel.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to come home on R&R leave,"

said Pfc. Paul Maddox of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-501st Aviation, as he prepared to travel by bus from Rhein Main to Fliegerhorst Kaserne in Erlensee, completing his trip from Iraq. "I'm looking forward to seeing my family, seeing my wife. My son was born this past Tuesday and I haven't seen pictures of him yet.

"This is a nice little break," added Maddox, explaining that he doesn't plan on going anywhere during his leave. "It's called R&R, rest and relaxation, and I'm not leaving the house."

"My husband called me two days ago to let me know he was coming," said Larissa Jeffreys, an employee at the community bank on Wiesbaden Army Airfield. "The unit first sergeant called me last night. . . . We're excited because we didn't expect this."

Jeffreys said the first thing her husband, Staff Sgt. Joshua Jeffreys of Company A, 141st Signal Battalion, was looking forward to upon getting home for his 15 days of R&R was taking a bath.

"I'm looking forward to going a week without hearing a gunshot," said Joshua after embracing Larissa upon arrival. "You get that every night where I'm living."

"We really want soldiers to know we appreciate what they're doing in



Photo by Karl Weisel

Larissa Jeffreys greets her husband Staff Sgt. Joshua Jeffreys of Wiesbaden's 141st Signal Battalion at Rhein Main Air Base as he returns from Iraq on R&R leave.

Iraq," said Maj. Lisiane Valentine, 64th Replacement Company commander. "Everyone in the 64th is proud to be a part of this. It's like our piece of the war — what we can do for our country."

"You can't get the mission done unless you have all of the players," said Trawick. "It takes all of us to do this. We are family."

R&R program information

Soldiers and families are advised to check the U.S. Army Europe home page at www.per.hq.usareur.army.mil/rr and page 24 of this issue for the latest information on the R&R program.

Soldiers and families should check with their rear detachment

chain of command for confirmation of inbound soldiers.

For force protection reasons no information on flights or manifests may be listed on the USAREUR website or given out through the R&R email hotline — rrinfo@hq.hq.usareur.army.mil.

Newsflash

AAFES refunds

The Army and Air Force Exchange Service will introduce a new non-receipt refund system Oct. 21. All requests for non-receipt refunds will be honored with a new AAFES Merchandise Card — the same as a gift card. It can be used the same way as cash to buy items at the PX or BX. The refund policy for items with a receipt has not changed. AAFES officials advise patrons to take the following steps to reduce the hassle of returning items: □ Keep receipts. □ Save all packaging and manuals that come with presents. □ Be extra careful when buying computer goods. □ Save all holiday gift receipts. □ If you don't understand the return policy, ask questions. (AAFES News Release)

Counterfeit ring cracked

Agents from the Defense Criminal Investigative Service and the 812th Military Police Company, assisted by Iraqi police and the Ministry of Finance, broke a counterfeit printing operation in Baghdad and seized counterfeit currency worth 100 billion dinars. DCIS agents and Military Police raided two locations, seized printing presses and arrested Amar Fadi Ramadan Al-Kayse, an Iraqi national suspect who was turned over to Iraqi Ministry of the Interior officials for prosecution. The investigation leading to Al-Kayse's arrest revealed evidence that he was printing and attempting to pass counterfeit 250 Iraqi dinar notes to the Central Bank of Iraq, which is funded and operated by the Coalition Provisional Authority. A new Iraqi currency will be introduced Oct. 15 which will no longer feature images of Saddam Hussein and will incorporate modern security features designed to foil counterfeiters, officials said. (DoD News)

Rhein Main giveaway

Members of military units are invited to cart away free items from Rhein Main Air Base, Building 341, Oct. 21 from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The items are excess property such as office furniture, office supplies, car care items, tool cabinets and vacuum cleaners and can only be taken for official government use. Shoppers must be ID card holders, bring own transportation and be prepared to carry the items from the site. For more information contact Staff Sgt. Cornett at Melissa.cornett@rheinmain.af.mil.



Photo by Karl Weisel

Gen. B.B. Bell, USAREUR commander, commends Leanon Trawick, 104th ASG transportation chief, and his coworkers for their support of the R&R program during a visit to Rhein Main Air Base Sept. 30.

Life improves for Anaconda soldiers

**Commentary by
Patricia Simoes**

*221st Base Support Battalion
Public Affairs Office*

As I look out the window while writing stories about local soldiers serving here at Logistical Support Area Anaconda in Balad, Iraq, I can't help but laugh at myself.

For starters I thought LSA Anaconda and Balad were two different places. I was shocked when I found out they are just two different ways of referring to the same place. For those who didn't know — LSA Anaconda is Balad.

This place is a lot bigger than I imagined — it has a 17-kilometer perimeter and almost 20,000 troops. Living conditions and morale are better than I expected.

Yes, the troops are ready to head home and they miss family terribly. But the units are really becoming a family, particularly for the people who moved here from Camp Virginia, Kuwait, and built this place into what it is today.

A Wiesbaden sergeant from the 205th Military Intelligence Brigade



Photo by Cassandra Kardeke

A local Iraqi man cheers as soldiers visit his town outside of LSA Anaconda.



Photo by Patricia Simoes

Although it may not look like home, living conditions for soldiers in Iraq continue to improve as flooring and air conditioning are installed in tents throughout LSA Anaconda.

said that coming to Balad was kind of like a big family reunion. His brigade has units spread all over the place, and the command arrived before the unit as a whole did. Meeting everybody here and cleaning all the filth and junk they found upon arrival and turning the place into a comfortable living area was the best experience of this deployment so far for him, he said.

His unit area now has its own gym, a place to shoot hoops, an Internet cafe and a soldier area with decorated walls that include a big map of the United States so soldiers can write down where they are from. They also have a wooden booth that looks like a giant lemonade stand where unit volunteers sell chips, candy, sodas and non-alcoholic beer. The money is used for barbecues and other unit gatherings with some of the money being saved for a big party in Germany when they redeploy.

The tents are not like home, but they are comfy. They are air-conditioned, there is a fridge and the soldiers watch DVDs and play games on laptops and TVs. The PX is hopping. A barber shop and alterations are now available. MWR offers pizza, ice cream, steak sandwiches, soda and non-alcoholic

beer.

You have to walk to the shower, but there are showers. Porta-potties are not ideal, but there is a door. For now most units still have to

burn waste, but soon all should have the regular porta-potties.

The chow is good. There are three dining facilities here now.

One could almost forget that it's Iraq. Now that the temperature ranges from the low 60s to high 90s, being out is almost comfortable. People run around the area, awards are given, soldiers are promoted — just like at a normal post.

Like many installations here, you hear shots and artillery in the middle of the night. That's when one is reminded this is not garrison. It's not an exercise. This is real. This is Iraq and there are people shooting at us and we are firing back. But soldiers say the enemy's rounds rarely ever make it inside the perimeter, and when they do it's near the edge. Hitting a target is rare.

Those who have been here a while also say that since the Ameri-

can artillery arrived, the opposing forces shoot from even farther out and miss most of the time.

One can't help wonder who "they" are. Leave the relative security of LSA Anaconda and all one sees are smiling faces, children running toward U.S. vehicles with their thumbs up and Iraqi adults blowing kisses. Are they the same ones who shoot at the coalition forces at night? Or do the bad people sleep all day and attack at night?

In any case one can only agree with the Army chaplain who said he was praying that the people of Iraq would learn to see that what the coalition forces are doing is good and that the attacks would stop.

Until that day comes the troops are staying strong — wanting to be home with family and friends, but doing the best they can to serve their country and fellow Americans.